

ENGLISH SPELLING ERRORS AMONG SRI LANKAN WRITERS

Introduction

English spelling is a baffling system, and its idiosyncrasies have been acknowledged since as early as the 16th century. Shakespeare signed his name in at least six different ways on various manuscripts. A.C. Baugh writes "Spelling is for most people a pedestrian subject, but for the English. . . in the 16th century the question of orthography or "right" writing was a matter of real importance and the subject of much discussion.¹ In our own century, Bernard Shaw's condemnation of the spelling of English as "anarchic and anachronistic" is well-known, while Jespersen refers to "that pseudo-historical and anti-educational abomination, the English spelling".² In this situation, it is hardly surprising that the proportion of spelling error in the English writing of all its users, Sri Lankan or otherwise, should be quite large.

In this paper, however, I wish to focus attention on English spelling errors among Sri Lankan writers in particular. By doing so, I attempt to differentiate between spelling errors common, excusable and predictable among first language users of the system, and those that occur among writers to whom English is essentially a second language. I wish to make the point that even among second language users of the language, there is a gradation in the type of error, and that certain types of errors begin to show up only among writers whose exposure to English is relatively low on the scale. Finally, I wish to outline certain implications for language teaching that emerge from this study.

The Inconsistencies of English Spelling

The main inconsistencies of English spelling are as follows: English spelling may be defined as "etymological" rather than "phonetic".³ Although in earlier times, it reflected pronunciation more or less accurately, in time, the spelling of words became standardised or fixed, while pronunciation continued to change. Thus *gh* in the notorious group of words *daughter, night, bough,ough, cough, through, though* etc. earlier represented a single sound, but

1. A. C. Baugh. *A History of the English Language*, (New York, 1957), p. 250

2. O. Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language*, (Stuttgart, 1988), p. 231

3. "It is for this reason that English spelling is sometimes said to be not phonetic but etymological—representative, that is, not of the present but of an earlier sound of words, and preserving therefore their earlier form". G.H. Vallins, *Spelling*, revised D. G. Scragg, (London 1965). p. 11.

in time became silent in some of the words, while in others its sound value changed to [f].⁴ As a result, modern English spelling no longer represents pronunciation alone, but also the history or etymology of words.

In addition, over the ages, the native vocabulary of English has been enriched by borrowings from a large number of languages, Latin, Scandinavian, French, Greek, Italian etc. In many of these cases, English has retained the alien conventions of spelling these borrowings, while anglicising their pronunciation. Examples are the following Greek derivatives where the initial consonant is spelt but not pronounced in English—*gnostic*, *mnemonic*, *pneumonia*, *psychology*, *ptomaine*.

Through these historical changes, English has acquired a host of symbols by which to represent a single sound, while the opposite case, in which a single symbol is used to represent several sounds, has also become common. For example, the sound [i] is represented by

<i>i</i>	in	pin
<i>e</i>	in	become
<i>ey</i>	in	donkey
<i>o</i>	in	women
<i>u & y</i>	in	busy
<i>ui</i>	in	build

Conversely, the single symbol *s* is used to represent the sound

[s]	in	this
[z]	in	these
[ʃ]	in	sugar

4. Throughout this paper, letters used in spelling will be represented by the relevant letter *italicised*. The set of phonetic symbols given below will be used to represent sounds. The standard pronunciation associated with words quoted will in each case be the Sri Lankan English pronunciation rather than the Received Pronunciation of Standard English. [] are used to enclose phonetic symbols and transcriptions. The set of symbols are a modified version of the set given in Daniel Jones, *English Pronouncing Dictionary*, (London 1963).

The symbols p, b, t, d, k, m, n, l, r, f, v, s, z, h, w have their customary sounds.

g as in give	CONSONANTS	j as in yes
th as in thin	dh as in <i>then</i>	tf as in <i>chin</i>
	ʃ as in <i>ship</i>	dʒ as in <i>jam</i>
	ʒ as in <i>measure</i>	

i as in it	VOWELS	ʌ as in <i>up</i>
ii as in <i>see</i>	u as in <i>put</i>	a as in <i>father</i>
e as in <i>get</i>	uu as in <i>too</i>	ə as in <i>butter</i>
ee as in <i>day</i>	o as in <i>molest</i>	ee as in <i>bird</i>
æ as in <i>cat</i>	oo as in <i>go</i>	
æ æ as in <i>bad</i>	ɔ as in <i>hot</i>	
	ɔɔ as in <i>saw</i>	

ai as in <i>fly</i>	DIPHTHONGS	uə as in <i>influence</i>
au as in <i>how</i>	ɔi as in <i>boy</i>	ea as in <i>there</i>
	iə as in <i>here</i>	

This has reduced the accuracy of English spelling as a phonetic system. By contrast, the spelling of Sinhalese is a far more phonetic system. Even in Sinhalese, many examples can be found where the one sound-one symbol principle is violated; or where spelling does not represent sound. For example, single unmodified consonant symbols, e.g. ක, ශ represent the consonant-vowel sequences [ka], [ga] in word initial position, e.g. කපනවා (cut) [kapə-nəvaa], ගහනවා (hit) [gahanəvaa], but the sequences [kə], [gə] in non-initial position, e.g. මකනවා (erase) [makənəvaa], මග (path) [magə].⁵

Again, a single standardised spelling represents dialectal variations in pronunciation, e.g. සඳුදා (Monday) represents a set of variant pronunciations, as in [sañdhudhaa], [hañdhudhaa], [savuñdhaa]. But, by and large, spelling in Sinhalese is a far better mirror of pronunciation than in English.

In some sets of English words, the etymological spelling has diverged so far from modern pronunciation as to have become freakish. Examples are the notorious group of *gh* words, or the frequent areas of silent letters, e.g.

<i>k</i>	as in	know
<i>g</i>	as in	gnaw
<i>w</i>	as in	write
<i>l</i>	as in	calm
<i>b</i>	as in	bomb (the second <i>b</i>)
<i>p</i>	as in	pneumonia, psychology, ptomaine
<i>n</i>	as in	solemn
<i>h</i>	as in	rhetoric

Another basic inconsistency in English spelling arises from the fact that it is a language of strong stress. In syllables that are strongly stressed, vowel symbols are given their full value in pronunciation. But in unstressed syllables, all vowels weaken to the neutral vowel [ə]. In the group of words 'baker' [beɪkə], 'elixir' [eliksə], 'actor' (æktə), 'Arthur' [aathə],⁶ the vowel symbols in the stressed syllables have their full values [ee], [e], [æ], and [aa]. But in the unstressed syllables, four separate symbols *e*, *i*, *o* and *u* weaken to [ə]. This again results in a departure from the phonetic principle in spelling.

The frequent and complicated changes that occur with suffixation are a third source of inconsistency. Whereas Sinhalese for instance adds suffixes with very little change in the neighbouring stem, English seems unable to add suffixes without innumerable additions, subtractions or changes of letters in

5. In quoting Sinhalese words, the word will be given in the Sinhalese script, followed by an English gloss within brackets, and a phonetic transcription. The following additional symbols will be used in transcription.

VOWELS : a as in කප (cut) (kapə)

CONSONANTS : ñ will be used before a consonant to indicate a prenasalised consonant as in සඳු (Monday) (sañdhudhaa).

6. Stressed syllables will be indicated by the use of ' before the syllable.

the stem. For example, a monosyllable ending with a single vowel followed by a consonant, e.g. *sad*, *dig* doubles this consonant before a suffix beginning with a vowel, e.g. *saddest*, *digging*. The rule is complicated by the fact that it neither applies when the suffix begins with a consonant, e.g. *sad*, *sadly* nor when the monosyllable ends with other combinations, e.g. two consonants as in *stick*, *sticking*, or two vowels followed by a consonant as in *loud*, *loudest*. When it comes to polysyllables, the rule vacillates further. It applies to polysyllables where the final syllable is stressed, e.g. *oc'cur*, *oc'curred*, but not when it is unstressed, e.g. *'benefit*, *'benefited*.⁷

Spelling Rules in English

Granted that English spelling is a system of many and large areas of inconsistency, is it to be considered a totally anarchic system, with no rules and regularities to guide the user? On the contrary, rules abound.⁸ The problem is rather that the rules of English spelling are so many, and so minor, that they cause further confusion. The rule quoted above, dealing with the doubling of consonant symbols in suffixation, is a coherent and comprehensive rule. At the same time the conditions of its application and non-application are so various and finicking, that they are bound to lead to confusion.⁹

Take as another example the rule by which the words *full* and *fill* lose an *l* when they enter into compounds like *fulfil*, *beautiful*, *powerful*. As a further condition, they cause the other element in the compound, if written with a double *l*, to lose one, e.g. *skilful*, *wilful*. Where *full* and *fill* occur with other prefixes and suffixes however, this rule does not apply, e.g. *fullness*, *refill*. The rule itself is of an extremely minor nature, applying to just two words of the English vocabulary.¹⁰ In addition, the conditions of its application are almost perverse in their particularity.

Even a rule that covers as large an area as pluralisation in English, is subject to a host of minor conditions. The rule itself is that *s* is added to any singular noun. But as conditions, a final *y* after a consonant becomes *ie* before this suffix is added, although the rule applies as usual if the *y* is preceded by a vowel, e.g. *lady*, *ladies* but *boy*, *boys*. Some nouns ending in *f* or *fe* change these to *v* or *ve* before the suffix, e.g. *loaf*, *loaves* and *knife*, *knives*. Other nouns of this type do not follow the rule, e.g. *reef*, *reefs*. After sibilant consonants or consonant combinations like *s*, *z*, *x*, *sh*, *tch*, *es* is added, e.g.

7. For a full account of the inconsistencies of English spelling, see Vallins, *Spelling*, Ch. 1 "Method and Madness".

8. Several rules governing word-building in English are outlined in Vallins, Ch. 3 "Spelling and Word-Building".

9. In fact, in discussing the spelling of "benefited" with an eminent member of the English teaching profession recently, when I outlined the relevant sub-section of the rule to him, he first stared, and then laughed incredulously as if to say he thought I'd made up the rule on the spot out of sheer female perversity.

10. A similar rule applies in an even more limited way in the case of *welfare* and *welcome*.

bus, buses; buzz, buzzes; box, boxes; dish, dishes; match, matches. Nouns ending in an *o* take *es* if they are preceded by a consonant, e.g. *potato, potatoes*. However, the rule does not apply if the noun is an abbreviation, or a borrowed word or an unfamiliar one, e.g. *photo, photos; banjo, banjos*. Nor does this rule apply when *o* is preceded by another vowel, e.g. *cameo, cameos*. Thus though English spelling cannot be said to be without rule, its complicated network of rules and exceptions causes problems to the learner.

Spelling Errors in English

The nature of English spelling being such, it is to be expected that spelling errors will occur in English writing with greater frequency than in languages with more logical systems or more generalised rules. Errors will probably arise oftenest where the rule itself is of a very minor nature, or where spelling has diverged furthest from pronunciation, or in the case of exceptions to the rule. In addition, errors may be linked to psychological factors, such as the general carelessness of the writer, his distaste for petty, trivial rules, or weak observation in literary matters, or even to physical factors like fatigue or poor eyesight. As in all matters, practice and regular exercise in both English reading and writing will tend to reduce the proportion of error in an individual's writing.

Spelling Errors among Sri Lankan Writers

In surveying English spelling in Sri Lanka today however, it becomes obvious that a sizeable proportion of errors arise not merely because of the basic eccentricities of English spelling or from interlinked psychological and physical factors, but as a result of other problems as well. In order to demonstrate this, I have tabulated spelling errors collected from four different groups of Sri Lankan students. This Table of Errors (Table 1) is given in full at the end of this paper. Column 1 numbers each type and category of error. Column 2 groups them under various headings, which suggest the varying sources and causes of the errors. Columns 3, 4, 5 and 6 are lists of the errors collected from four different groups of students.¹¹ In the case of only those errors where the wrong spelling obscures the meaning of the intended word, the correct form is given within brackets beneath the wrong form. Where more than one spelling is used by the same writer for a single word, these are linked together by a double bracket in the Table.

The first set of errors was collected from compositions written by 60 students for the Certificate in English Examination conducted by the University of Colombo in 1981. The Certificate in English is a two year course conducted

11. May I apologise to the unsuspecting students from whose work these errors are collected, and state that this is not meant to be any reflection on the quality of their work as students.

for students who have successfully completed their Proficiency in English Examination. The course is an introduction to speaking and writing in English at a level of maturity appropriate to university students, and in some technical contexts relevant to them; as well as reading fairly widely in different types and styles of English. Students who pass this Examination would come somewhat below the standard of those with an "A" Level pass in English.

The second set of errors comes from two sets of answer scripts of 30 students for the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Teaching of English as a Second Language) Examination conducted by the University of Colombo in 1981. These were answer scripts for the papers in English Language, and Language Arts. These students are an adult group, with at least five years' experience in teaching, and first degrees in the English medium. They are a mixed group, and range in standard from just a little above Certificate in English to very good degree students in English.

The third set of errors come from dissertations (each not exceeding 10,000 words) written by five students for the Special Arts Degree in English conducted by the University of Peradeniya in 1981. These students would obviously belong to the class of those with the highest fluency in English in Sri Lanka. In addition, since these errors are collected from carefully prepared and typed dissertations rather than answer scripts written under pressure of examination conditions, the standard of the writers would be relatively higher than their standard under everyday conditions.¹²

The last set of errors are collected not from examination work, but from weekly classwork of ten First Year students reading English for the Degree in the University of Colombo during the first term of 1982. These are students with "A" Level passes and above in English. The fact that these are samples from classwork during a first term means that some evidence of exposure to correction and improvement of standard should be present. It is important to mention that standards in English at this level have shown a marked decline within the last 3—5 years, and that approximately 20% of the group may even be considered of equal standard with the highest in the Certificate in English group.

In tabulating the errors of these four groups, I have categorised errors into three types. Type A are those arising because of the eccentricities of English spelling. Types B and C however are those that arise in contexts where English is used as a second language, rather than as the language of all habitual day-to-day communication; where English functions as a library

12. All errors collected from scripts and dissertations sent to me for marking were, of necessity, gathered under pressure of working to a time limit to return the papers. Thus though the lists given are by and large, conscientiously prepared, I cannot vouch for 100% accuracy.

or classroom language, or a language not frequently used or practised. Type B are mainly errors of "Deviant Pronunciation Spelling". Most of these are attempts by second language learners to represent phonetically an assortment of deviant pronunciations. As might be expected, the errors major in those areas of English pronunciation that cause most difficulty for second language learners whose mother tongue is Sinhalese or Tamil, the [s]/[z], [s]/[ʃ] and [ʃ]/[ʒ] distinctions, the [p]/[f] and [f]/[v] distinctions, the [o]/[ɔ] distinction and the area of consonant clusters and voiced/voiceless consonants. It might be predicted that errors of this type will vary widely over different countries in which English is used as a second language.

Type C are errors that result from inadequate exposure both to English reading and writing. Lack of practice in handling the spelling conventions of English go hand in hand here with general carelessness in using these conventions, causing slips in both reading and writing, and the use of more than one spelling by the same writer. Although this type of careless error is found even among non-second language learners, and is linked with psychological factors like general carelessness, the frequency and gravity of error indicate a lack of standardisation that could only result from scanty or uncorrected use of the spelling system. Table 2 at the end of this paper gives a breakdown of the number of errors recorded for each group under each Type.

The Peradeniya group, i.e. those with highest fluency, who would probably all be users of English as a first or main language, record no errors of Type B or C. Their errors are entirely due to the eccentricities of English spelling and as Table 2 shows, almost 50% of these errors are in the areas of double letters in stems, or compounds. The occurrence of double letters in stems follows few definable rules, and compounds are a set of words in which writing conventions change rapidly. Thus errors in these areas would be the most excusable. In addition, many of the words that are misspelt are of low frequency in general usage, e.g. the proper name "Thackeray" or the technical adjective "epistolary". Even the errors recorded form only 6% of the total recorded for all four groups under Type A.

Significantly, the eccentricities of English spelling cause most problems to all four groups. However, in the lowest fluency group, all of whom would be second language users of English, the number of Type B and C errors form a significant proportion of all errors recorded for the group, almost half the number recorded under Type A. Thus it is clear that where second language users are concerned, errors of Type B and C also cause sizeable problems, and therefore need to be given special attention and remedial treatment. In the area of the eccentricities of English spelling, the fact that this group demonstrates immense difficulties, tends to signal a need for greater classroom attention to spelling problems, and the outlining of general rules.

This aspect of English teaching has been ignored in the pressure of handling more urgent problems of second language teaching in Sri Lanka, and at the lower levels of proficiency, it is perhaps necessary that this be so. But at least at Certificate level, or the level at which those with a bare proficiency in English begin to handle seriously the task of writing in English, the statistics indicate that unless some time is spent on spelling, such students will not progress to becoming intelligible, and therefore acceptable members of the English using community.

Analysis of Errors in Table 1

Errors of Type A, "Eccentricities of English Spelling", are grouped under several headings. In general, they arise as a result of ignorance of the basic areas of inconsistencies, the rules of English spelling, and outstanding exceptions and irregularities. These errors are grouped in Table 1 into areas that cause large-scale problems, ignorance of miscellaneous spelling rules and irregularities (A(1)), the use of double letters in stems (A(2)), the choice of single or double *l* (A(3)), *c* or *s* to represent the sound [s] (A(4)), the writing of compound words (A(5)), the spelling of words in which weak stress has led to the neutralising of a vowel (A(6) i-vii), other areas in which the writer has attempted to reduce the inconsistent system of English to a more phonetic system (A(7) i-iv), and a converse attempt to impose a more exotic spelling than necessary, by analogy with other words in which such exotic or alien conventions are used (A(8)).

The Peradeniya group record a few errors under spelling rules of suffixation, e.g. the omission of an *e* in *sizable*, confusion in the use of *e* and *a* to represent the neutral vowel in unstressed syllables, e.g. *e* for *a* in *irreperable*, and *a* for *e* in *speciman*, slight problems in the use of *e* to represent [i], e.g. *rarifed* and the use of more exotic conventions than necessary, e.g. *e* for *i* in *prestigeous*.¹³ Rather more errors come under the use of double letters and compounds. In the wrong use of double letters there is a frequent confusion between two letters that could be doubled. Where both should be doubled, only one is, as in the omission of an *m* in *accomodate*. Where only one should be doubled, both are, as in the unnecessary doubling of *s* in *occassional*. In the compounds, elements that are generally written together are separated, e.g. *news papers*. These are particularly tricky areas in English spelling, and such errors are likely among writers of various nationalities of the highest levels of fluency.

The Colombo First Years record a greater number and variety of errors. There is much greater disregard for spelling rules, e.g. *skillful, skilfull, skillfull, happyness, dirtyness*. The problem in double letters is not merely confusion

13. Misspelt words are given here as collected. Only where the spelling error obscures the meaning of the intended word, the correct form will be given in brackets beside the wrong form.

between two sets of possibilities, but the use of double letters where none exist, e.g. *situation*, or omission where they are regularly used, e.g. *dazling*. The attempts to phoneticise spelling are more varied, e.g. *skeem*, *gosts*, *imotions* *maious*. The exotic spellings are more bizarre, e.g. *cleaver* (clever), *perpouse* (purpose). A fair proportion of words in which [s] should be written with *c* are written with *s*, e.g. *urgensy*, *silense*. The Certificate group make similar mistakes, but in their case the problem is two-way, *s* for *c* e.g. *servise*, *redate*, and *c* for *s*, *conconsiderable*, *councilar* (*counsellor*).

Though the type of error among the First Years is still not very serious, there seems to be a need for wider exposure to the written word, both through reading and writing. Even more, the mistakes seem to be the result of uncorrected writing habits, and the implications seem to be for greater watchfulness over spelling at school level. In fact, the use of two spellings by the same writer are here the result not of carelessness but of response to correction within the first term at university. Unrecorded in Table I is the subsequent use of the correct form; a full history should read *rhythmn*, *rhythumn*, *rhythm* by the same writer within one term.

The Diploma group exhibit less Type A errors than the First Years. A large number of their errors are concentrated in the area of the use of *e* instead of *a* to represent the neutral vowel in unstressed syllables. This area appears from the performance of all four groups to strike most writers as a specially eccentric area of English, and should therefore rate in a gradation of errors as one of least gravity.

The Certificate group signal the fact that they are second language users of English by their multitude of errors. They record a large number under every category. It is also noteworthy that many items which are misspelt are fairly everyday words — *writting*, *leggs*, *oill*, *wel* (well), *for get*, *fames* (famous), *troble*, (trouble) in contrast with the more sophisticated *scurrillous*, *atrocities*, *auxilliary* of other groups. However, there are also some technical words *fertility* (fertility), *implimentation*, *compittive*, *industrilise*, *tecnology* etc., that demonstrate that when such writers attempt to move outside the limited vocabulary of everyday things and write on more sophisticated or technical subjects they again encounter difficulties. Thus spelling becomes for such writers a burden and an obstacle to their freedom and confidence in writing, both on everyday matters, and on more advanced subjects. Thus, the use of some classroom time on outlining basic spelling rules, discussion of errors and dictation would appear to be an investment at this level.

Errors of Type B, "Deviant Pronunciation Spelling" are also grouped under several headings. Problems in major areas of pronunciation difficulty are grouped separately, as in the confusion of [s]/[z] (B(2)), [f]/[ʃ] (B(3)), [s]/[ʃ]

(B(4)), [p]/[f] (B(5)), [f]/[v] (B(6)), [o]/[ɔ] (B(7)), and voiced/voiceless consonants (B(9)), or the Sri Lankan aversion to consonant clusters (B(8)). Other errors in minor areas are given together as a miscellaneous group of bad pronunciation spelling (B(1)). As might be expected, the Peradeniya group record no errors of this type. First Year errors of this type were collected from only 20% of the group. This indicates that the group offering English as a Degree subject are no longer a homogeneous group whose main language is English. The Diploma group record only a few, but rather significant errors. Again these are drawn from a fraction of the entire group. As the type of error is similar to those of the Certificate group, I shall deal with them together. All these errors, though arising from an effort to phoneticise English spelling, are also indicative of deviant pronunciation e.g. *short* (sort), *chief* (cheap), *law* (low). Thus these problems in spelling can be sorted out not through an awareness of spelling rules, but by remedial work on pronunciation. This also demonstrates why deviant pronunciation is doubly dangerous, it - leads to unintelligibility in both speech and writing. To remedy such errors one would ask that more classroom time be given to reading aloud and pronunciation practice.

Consonant clusters, that are a pet aversion in the phonology of both Sinhalese and Tamil, cause some interesting errors in spelling. These errors mirror either the user's tendency to drop one or more of the consonants in pronunciation, e.g. *attemp*, *deta* and *detail*, (both "detailed"), or to break up the cluster in pronunciation by inserting vowels between the consonants, e.g. *estabilish*, *migarate*. The fact that Colombo First Years record errors in dropping consonants, but not inserting vowels suggests a gradation in the errors. Both types are likely to occur among those who are not first language users of English, but as the exposure to English even as a second language reduces, insertion of vowel errors are likely to show up in greater numbers. Whether or not such errors appear in the writing of second language users of English in other areas of the world would depend on the place of consonant clusters in the phonologies of their first language.

A particularly interesting category of error in the "Deviant Pronunciation Spelling" type are those that reflect a lack of differentiation between voiceless and voiced plosive consonants in the pronunciation of the writer. Examples are *satly* (sadly), *effort* (afford), where the final [d] is devoiced into [t]. Devoicing of a final plosive is a characteristic of both Sinhalese and Tamil, as illustrated in the change of consonant in the Sinhalese pair දඹ [dhigə] and දඹ් [dhik] (long). The tendency of the second language user of English is to pronounce *bag* as [bæək] and *side* as [sait] etc., and reflect the deviant pronunciation in corresponding spelling errors. Even more interesting are spellings like *water-pumb* (water pump) and *brobelms* (problems), where voiced plosives are substituted in initial, medial and final positions. This spelling appears to indicate a Tamil writer (not verifiable from answer

script), for it is in Tamil phonology rather than Sinhalese that voiced and voiceless plosives are in complementary distribution in initial and medial positions. The writer probably uses the pronunciation [pʌmb] for *pump*, and reflects this in his selection of the spelling *pumb*. This substantiates the point that this type of spelling error will vary from writer to writer, depending on his first language.

In a gradation of errors, Type B errors will rate below Type A. Insertion of vowels in consonant clusters will rate below omission of a consonant in the cluster. Devoicing of final plosives and faulty differentiation in initial and medial plosives cannot be graded relative to each other as they are problems of different language groups rather than those of degree of exposure to English.

Errors of Type C, "Inadequate Exposure" problems are a small set. Some of the Colombo First Year errors of this type are not problems of second language learners, but rather mistakes of carelessness and lack of exposure to correction. Note the writer who gives both *buisness* and *business* during one term's work, the latter the result of exposure to correction, which ultimately produced the correct form *business* as well. The Certificate group problems however are more serious. They appear in basic words, *wrok* (work), *tw* (two) etc. These errors involve the transposition of letters, e.g. *wrok*, *affrod* (afford), omission of letters, e.g. *becase*, (because), *agin* (again), and addition of letters, e.g. *orther* (other), *practrice* (practice). All three categories suggest that the word has hardly been linked to its pronunciation. The writer has possibly seen it only in print, and never pronounced it aloud at all. These are obviously cases in which English is being used, if at all, strictly as a library language. If English is needed only at this level for such students, the problem should require no further attention. The Certificate group however comprise those who go into job situations where English is needed not only for reading, but fairly demanding speaking and writing assignments as well. Thus the errors appear to indicate that at this level there is a need for more classroom time to be used for speech, and also reading aloud, where the written symbol becomes linked in the user's mind with its pronunciation.

At the end of Table I, I have collected, from other places in the Table, examples of more than one spelling used by the same writer. Those listed under Colombo First Years are examples of the same writer's performance after correction. But the Certificate group sample occur in each case within a single essay. Thus one writer in the same essay writes, "problem" as *probelem*, *propelm*, and *probelm*. This absence of standardisation is a clear indication of inadequate practice in writing. It reveals the groping, experimental nature of the writer's attempt to set his words down, a fact further demonstrated by numerous scratches and deletions in such scripts. The teaching implication is for regular writing practice at this level.

Summary

Summarising, the spelling system of English gives rise to a large proportion of errors in its use. But while many of these errors are excusable and occur among first language users of the system, other types occur only among second language users. The deviant pronunciation of such writers is frequently mirrored in their spelling errors. The fact that English is a library language to many of them, and that written symbols are not linked in their minds with any pronunciation (even deviant) is reflected in transposition, omission and addition of letters in spelling basic vocabulary items. Such writers also make many more mistakes, and in simpler vocabulary items than first language users in the manipulation of English spelling rules.

On the basis of errors listed in Table 1, it seems possible to grade spelling errors. I attempt below a rough, subjective gradation based on the preceding discussion.

Type A Errors in : sophisticated vocabulary items.
compounds.
wrong choice of two possible positions for double letters in stems.
use of [ə] in unstressed syllables.
wrong use of double or single letters in stems where no choice is involved.
spelling rules and irregularities.

Type C Errors in first language users of English.
Errors of carelessness and lack of exposure to correction.

Type A Errors in : other types of phonetic spelling.
s for c to represent [s].
c for s to represent [s].
exotic spelling.
basic, everyday items.

Type B Errors:

Dropping of a consonant in a cluster.

Insertion of vowels in a consonant cluster.

Type C Errors among second language users, especially in basic items.

Implications for teaching seem to be as follows. Even among students to whom English is a first or main language there is a need for wider exposure to reading and writing; also to systematic correction and some guidance in the rules and exceptions of English spelling. Among second language users, there is a need for wider exposure to reading and writing, and rules, with classroom time devoted to discussion of errors and dictation. At the lower levels of fluency among this group, the printed word needs to be related to its pronunciation, through reading aloud, and practice in both listening and speaking. Such implications however are only for those who need to use the writing system of English.

TABLE 1
Table of Errors

No	Area of Error	Certificate Course 81	Diploma (TESL) 81	Peradeniya SAD 81	Colombo First Years 82
A	Eccentricities of English Spelling				
(1)	Spelling rules and irregularities (Miscellaneous)	writing developped divolopping joining stoped thugarisms planing (planning) including studing staing enjoind	benefitted interpritted posseses heros arguement humourous	occurring sizable	writing whispering traveler draging unvaring dirtyness lonelyness wearyness
(2)	Double Letters in Stems	acomodate oill leggs addopt late commers tripple sallary commic studdy sollution biggins possition around opparate oppinieniance actualy beter strugling	scurrillous professional millenium carreer immitate charriots miscelaneous auxilliary	acomodate commissions occcasional carreer atrocities	aliteration situation confussion auxilliary conection
(3)	1/11	wel (well) specially allways usefull carefull shamefull fulfill controll			skillfull skillfull skilfull stilness

No.	Area of Error	Certificate Course 81	Diploma (TESL) 81	Peradeniya SAD 81	Colombo First Years 82
(4)	c/s	coniderable councilar (counsellor) nessecities desition surcomstants (circumstance) resent (recent) servise reduse conern dansing insident facilities partisipate consequenses especialy			silense urgensy produse enhanses assending reconsiliation
(5)	Compounds	strate forward late commers for get with in out come there fore your self	house hold more over frame work piece meal	back ground news papers further more	
(6)	Weak Stress and Neutralising of Vowels				
(i)	where <i>a</i> should appear	importent servents beggars privet hospitel cultural remembrece peculier perticular permenant immedietly sympethise	seperate relevent performance personel (personal) utterence competant descendent equivelant redundency	pleasent irreperable epistolery (epistolary)	pleasent remembrece appearence melencholy
(ii)	where <i>e</i> should appear	fual crual genaral tablat influance sigarates scenaries ceramony experiance reasant prominant opparate thugarisms machinaries devolop consequently buckting	talant repetition	speciman	manner (manner) hightnes repetition entre

No.	Area of Error	Certificate Course 81	Diploma (TESL) 81	Paradeniya SAD 81	Colombo First Years 82
(iii)	where <i>e</i> should appear after a consonant	peopel circul theartor	sylabel tussel principal (principle)		gentel
(iv)	where <i>u</i> should appear	difficlt luxury surples			figare
(v)	where <i>o</i> should appear	creater stubbern corperation comfetably accomadation	warrier ideams		monotany
(vi)	where <i>ou</i> should appear	fames			
(vii)	where <i>i</i> should appear	fertility (fertility)	attitudanal		
(7)	Phonetic Spelling				
(i)	Wrong symbols to represent :				
	[ii]	plece } plese } (please) reson increse incrise thise relife achive Sinhalise chiep (cheap) oppianiance theif seanarics weak (week) speach reasan+ hear (here)	yeilds		tideous incrise deels (deals) extream
	[i]	benifits vegitable implimentation celebrate develop } divolop } forine } foring } heverly	indegenous interpritted discribe	rarified	re-enforce discribe distruction imotions
	[e]	helth defecit dificit meny compittive mesur masur (measure)			hevenly

No.	Area of Error	Certificate Course 81	Diploma (TESL) 81	Peradeniya SAD 81	Colombo First Years 82
A (7) i.	[ee]	verious detales strate grate	saileint		
	[ə] & [æ]	earlierst derth beloverd			
	[iə]	industrilize petroleum			fearce fearse hear (here)
	[ia]	idia compairing unfare			
	[ea]			there (their)	
	[ai]	by (buy) good by (goodbye) good buy (goodbye)			highten analise
	[ʌ]	troble contries			
	[oo]	bosting roll (role)	groning		moanful boardom
	[uu]	sutable		grusomely	
	[k]	buttic striked (strict) tecnology picknic scheam		Thakeray	skeem (scheme)
	[dʒ] [w]	buget wich (which) witch(which) wether(whether)			
	[g]				gosts
	[f]	sofisticated			
[r]				rithm	
(ii)	omission of final e	wast becaus welcoms creat			lonly creat shatterd
(iii)	omission or transposition of other letters	particulrly evironment scarcity determinde	heterogenous homogenous	parlimentary	specail remembering imegry whos (whose) gaity
(iv)	addition of letters				employes

No.	Area of Error	Certificate Course 81	Diploma (TESL) 81	Peradeniya SAD 81	Colombo First Years 82
(8)	Exotic Spelling	pearson clearks pearents afread dieapture devide defferent phenomyna phylosophers ceromoneies continiously neumourous beuerocracy floor (flour) innoscent adjenda whife develope whome allowe levele owener mostly controle modern circule science(since) problem desiouring	neuclear priviledged commar	underpriviledged	perpouse } perpous } rhythmnn } rhythmnn } cleaver regreatful heightens
B	Deviant Pronunciation Spelling				
(1)	Miscellaneous	troble bosting quiet(quite) stated(started) effort(afford) alavance compartively mordern valuble Matropolitan allian(alien) carrier actord (acted) particepted (participated) essy (easy) agin (again) exacatives latter (letter) parrarel sigar (singer) sheam (scheme) ambassies responsibalits calification fatch (fetch) fatch (fetch) gardinning	unparalled prounce (pronounce) omitted (omitted) imparative		tanza (stanza) swining (swinging) pathatic sodic (sordid)

No.	Area of Error	Certificate Course 91	Diploma (TESL) 81	Peradeniya SAD 81	Colombo First Year 82
(2)	[s]/[z]	opiniance plece } (please) pleasce } recidence advised mucium prize } (price) price }			noice
(3)	[f]/[z]	occcation conclution			
(4)	[s]/[ʃ]	short (sort) harreshment porson(portion) fasionable			
(5)	[p]/[f]	chief (cheap) airfort pill (fill) profe (prove)	praseology		
(6)	[f]/[v]				
(7)	[o]/[ɔ]	odiences bus holt sow (saw) otoumaticcaly outermaticly fourty (forty) ogernisation couce (cause) accoding borth (both) bording cause (course) morter (motor)	odacity		no(nor)
(8)	Consonant Clusters	estabilish p-robelem migarate strick (strict) apologies (apologised) attemp govermen resent(reason)			detail } detail } (detailed)
(9)	Voiced/ Voiceless Plosives	water-pumb (water pump) brinks (brings) probelem } probelm } propelm } brobelms satly (sadly) effort (afford)			

No.	Area Error	Certificate Course 81	Diploma (TESL) 81	Peradeniya SAD 81	Colombo First Years 82
C	Inadequate Exposure to English :				
(1)	Faulty reading and writing				
(i)	transposition of letters	wrok (work) thire (their) tow (two) affrod (afford) buissness			buissness } business } quittness } (quietness)
(ii)	omission of letters	severl satisfy (satisfy) suddnly becase shold requested developed agin (again)			
(iii)	addition of letters	orther practrice furture comparrision			
(iv)	other problems	particepted (participated) family (family) essy (easy) sigar (singer) tribbled (tripled or trebled) facilicates (facilities) responsibalits compel sarry requers (requires) stedent remunitions (remuneration)	work stock (wordstock) clalme reptions (repetitions)		beging (beginning) analysised (analysis) analisis (analyse) imery } imegry } imagery emphisis (emphasise) revibrating
More than one Spelling by the same writer		mesur } masur } measure probelem } propelm } probelm } devolop } divolop } prize } price } (price)			imery } imegry } perpouse } perpous } buissness } business } rhythmnn } rhythumn }

TABLE 2.

Statistics of Errors Recorded for each group of Students under each Type

No	Type of Error	Certificate Course 81	Diploma (TESL) 81	Peradeniya SAD 81	Colombo First Years 82
A	Eccentricities of English Spelling	207 i.e. 59% of total Type A errors in the four groups.	49 14% of total	21 6% of total	73 21% of total
B	Deviant Pronunciation Spelling	72 82% of total	06 7% of total	—	10 11% of total
C	Inadequate Exposure to English	28 67% of total	03 7% of total	—	11 26% of total